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UNCLAS VIENNA 003651

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/OHI, L/LEI AND EUR/AGS

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SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT APPROVES ACCELERATED PAYMENTS TO

HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

1. On November 16, the Austrian parliament unanimously approved advance payments to Holocaust victims from the General Settlement Fund (GSF). A Green-sponsored motion to decouple the government-funded portion of the GSF from attainment of legal peace in the U.S. attracted no support from the other parties, however. Chancellor Schuessel stressed that he had "great interest in concluding this chapter in a positive way as soon as possible." Noting that legal peace might be imminent, Schuessel remarked, "We are just a few centimeters away from the finish line." The amendment also extends the application period for in-rem restitution of publicly held real property to December 31, 2006.

2. Parliamentary President Khol (OVP) recalled Chancellor Schuessel's and Stuart Eizenstat's roles in bringing about the Washington Agreement and expressly thanked the Austrian Jewish Community (IKG) for urging dismissal of the Whiteman suit in the U.S. Khol appealed to legislators to pass the amendment unanimously so that "we can initiate advance payments for the first 6,000 to 7,000 victims." He also thanked the Austrian business community for participating in establishing the USD 210 million fund. Speakers from all parties hoped for a disposition of the last remaining U.S. class action suit so that payments can begin "before the end of the year." van Voorst